

# Early Tax Records of Sweden, part 1 (1535-1577)

By Geoffrey Fröberg Morris AG®

## Introduction

Occasionally you may see a Swedish published genealogy that goes back to the 1500s. How is this possible? To do this, you would need to follow a family line through the parish records to the early 1700s or as far back as you can go. From there, you would switch to the *mantals* tax records, but they stop in 1642. Where do you look now? At this point, you need to use early tax records. Between 1535 and 1635 there are more than 12 different types of tax records! In this presentation, we will discuss the background, payment amounts, and record accessibility for 6 tax records that were collected between 1535 to 1577.

## 1. Gärder och hjälper 1535

The Swedish government collected taxes multiple times in the 1530s, mainly to support the military. The *Hjälpeskatt* from 1535 stands out from the others because of the number of preserved volumes. This is the earliest tax record with kingdom wide coverage (except it is missing Närke and large parts of Uppland). The tax was collected between April – May of 1535. The surviving books include the following provinces, Dalarna, Dalsland, Gästrikland, Hälsingland, Medelpad, Småland, Södermanland, Värmland, Västergötland, Västmanland, parts of Uppland, Ångermanland, Öland, Östergötland and Finland.<sup>1</sup> Normally the landowning farmers paid more than the nobility. In some parts of the kingdom the landowning farmers paid 2 *mark*, compared to 1 *mark* paid by the nobility. Each *mark* was worth either 6 or 8 *öre* depending on province you lived in. Payment amounts were determined by people's wealth, for example a torpare paid 1 *mark*, a poor Bergsman paid 6 *öre*, and women in the household paid 2 *öre*.<sup>2</sup>

### Access

Riksarkivet: Not available at Riksarkivet online. Originals can be requested to the reading room.<sup>3</sup>

ArkivDigital: <http://www.arkivdigital.se/aid/info/v915774.b10>

FamilySearch: Never microfilmed

## 2. Silverskatten 1560

At the summer diet of Gustav I in 1560, the king decided to collect a tax for the crown prince Erik XIV to seek the marriage of Queen Elisabeth I of England. This tax was sometimes called *Hjälpgården för kronprins Eriks engelska resa* but is more commonly called *Silverskatten 1560*. The nobility was not tax obligated but paid anyway in money, gold and silver objects, pelts, and

<sup>1</sup> Archive Info from: Strödda räkenskaper och handlingar t o m 1630: Gärder och hjälper 1535 in ArkivDigital.

<sup>2</sup> Magnus Bäckmark. Mantalsforska, Släktforskning i mantalslängder, Handbok 8. Sveriges Släktforskarförbund, Malmö 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Gärder och hjälper 1535, Riksarkivet <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/arkiv/7KYNeBUQrH6d0002H087k3>

other goods. Priests, stewards, citizens of towns and cities contributed to varied amounts. In rural areas, each head of household was obligated to an adjusted amount based on their wealth.

### Access

Riksarkivet: <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/?postid=Arkis+fc6908ea-899c-4c48-9edc-ea8876c72f41&s=Balder>

ArkivDigital: Not available.

FamilySearch:

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/490576?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

## 3. Brudskattelängderna 1563 and 1579 – 1582

Both taxes were gathered for royal weddings. The 1563 tax was for the dowry of the king's sister Anna to George John I, Count Palatine of Veldenz- Lauterecken married on December 20, 1562 at the royal castle in Stockholm. The couple stayed in Sweden for a time while the dowry was collected. The parish priest paid 10% of his income. The headings vary area to area, for example the heading for Långasjö parish in Konga *härad* in Kalmar reads: *Brudskatten afr. Konga häradth som opåbuden waz Anno 1563*. The 1579 - 1582 tax was for the dowry of the king's youngest sister Elisabeth when she married Christopher, Duke of Mecklenburg on May 7, 1581. The only differences between the 1563 and 1579 tax records are the time, and number of volumes (1563 had 2 volumes, 1579 had 3 volumes).

### Access

Riksarkivet: 1563 <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/arkiv/7aYNeBUQrH6d0002H087k3>. 1579 <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/arkiv/7qYNeBUQrH6d0002H087k3>.

ArkivDigital: Not available.

FamilySearch:

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/490583?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

## 4. Hjälp – och silverskattelängder 1569 – 1570

This was a tax in money or silver, which was adjusted according to the wealth of the individual. The tax was gathered between 1569 – 1570 from farmers and burghers in the cities in mid-Sweden (not south of Södermanland), Northern Sweden, and Finland. There are surviving records from the provinces of Uppland, Södermanland, Västmanland, Dalarna, Norrland, and Finland. In Gästrikland, they paid 8 *mark* per person, but the amount was adjusted according to their ability to pay. Tenant farmers and people relying on the assistance of others paid less or nothing at all. Similar rules applied to other areas too.

### Access

Riksarkivet: <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/arkiv/84YNeBUQrH6d0002H087k3>

ArkivDigital: Not available

FamilySearch:

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/490587?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

## 5. Älvsborgs lösen 1571 (-1573)

At the beginning of Northern Seven Years War (1563 – 1570) the Danes captured Älvsborg fortress with an army of 25,000 army mercenaries. This fortress protected Sweden's only western port. With the peace agreement and the treaty of Stettin in 1570, the Swedes withdrew claims to Norway, Skåne, Halland, Blekinge and Gotland. The Danes withdrew their claims to Sweden but demanded 150,000 riksdaler in silver coin. The money was gathered by imposing a wealth tax of 10% of livestock and moveable property from the clergy, the nobility, and the public. The collection of this tax was also determined on the wealth or ability to pay. Because payment had to be paid in silver, this tax is sometimes referred to as the *silverskatt*. The records created from this tax are in 21 volumes.

### Access

Riksarkivet: Go to <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/alvsborgs-losen> and choose **Älvsborgslösen 1571** from the dropdown menu. Click **Sök** and then choose the province by clicking on the **Bild** icon.

ArkivDigital: Not available

FamilySearch:

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/496371?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

## 6. Drängepenningarna 1576 – 1577

In 1576, King Johan III issued a mandate for taxation of craftsmen and hired male servants, as the government thought they demanded too high prices and respective wages of the peasants. The collection of these so-called *Drängepenningar* were collected between 1576-1577. The records sometimes include sons of farmers, in-laws, housewives, and tenant workers. There are surviving records for Östergötland, Småland, Uppland, Västergötland, Västmanland, Värmland, Dalarna, Dalsland, Gästrikland, and Hälsingland.

### Access

Riksarkivet: <https://sok.riksarkivet.se/arkiv/8aYNeBUQrH6d0002H087k3>


ArkivDigital: Not available

FamilySearch:

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/490601?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

## Research Tips

1. All these tax records predate the constitution of 1634 when the Swedish government created the county structure. So, all these tax records are organized by the province (*landskap*), district (*härad*), and the parish (*socken*). Use the parish pages in the FamilySearch Wiki to find the name of the province if needed.
2. Availability of these tax records is varied. Here are the options:
  - In most cases, the volumes were microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah (now FamilySearch) or by The National Archives of Sweden (Riksarkivet, formerly SVAR) and are published on the Riksarkivet website or on FamilySearch.

- You will find that sometimes the record is easier to find and use on Riksarkivet, and other times on FamilySearch.
  - The records on FamilySearch are accessed through the FamilySearch Catalog. If you see a  symbol, then you must go to a Family History Center to view the images.
  - ArkivDigital does not have most of these early tax records in their collections.
3. Records from Sweden are organized in the FamilySearch catalog by county, not province. Some counties and provinces are identical e.g., Södermanland province and Södermanland county. In other cases, they are not, e.g., Småland province includes the counties of Jönköping, Kalmar, and Kronoberg. See the provinces in Sweden page for more information [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Provinces\\_of\\_Sweden](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Provinces_of_Sweden).
  4. In some cases, Riksarkivet will prompt you to log in as a registered user. The account is in accordance with the Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and is free.
  5. The handwriting between 1535 and about 1599 is a mixture of old German script with influence from the revival of Carolingian minuscule from the late renaissance. Throughout the 1600s the handwriting is dominated by old German script.
  6. In some cases, you will find that researchers in Sweden may have published a book on a particular tax record or set of records for a specific province. Check the FamilySearch catalog by the name of the county, and then look under the topic “taxation.”